

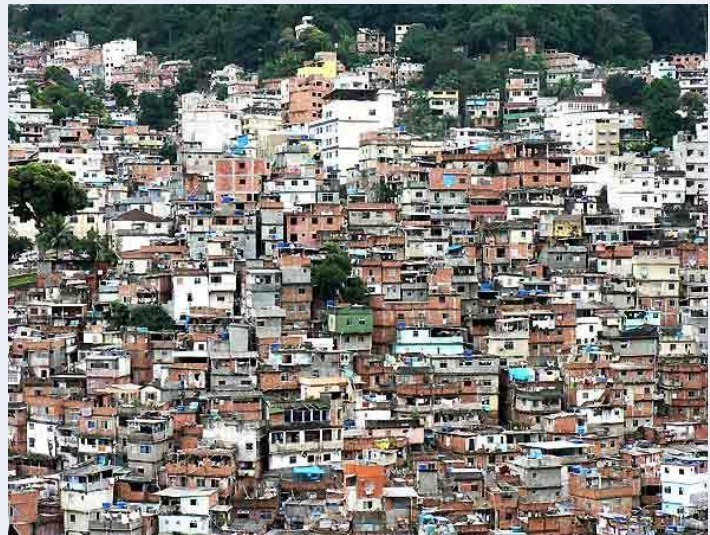
# The Rise of Slums



## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) defines a **slum** as a place of residence lacking one or more of the following: durable housing, sufficient living area, access to **improved water**, access to sanitation, and **secure tenure**.<sup>i</sup> Slums are usually characterized by **urban decay**, high rates of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment, social problems, lack of **infrastructure**, and a large **informal economy** that operates unofficially and outside of the formal business dealings of a city.

Today, over 1 billion people worldwide live in slums and that number is projected to grow to 2 billion by 2030.<sup>ii</sup> Most modern slums lack many basic services such as clean water, electricity, and sanitation services. Slums can be found all over the world, though they are extremely common in **developing countries**. A 2006 report by UN-HABITAT found that the number of people living in slums in India has more than doubled in the past two decades.<sup>iii</sup> Due to their fast growth rate and lack of basic necessities, it is critical that the rise of slums be addressed on the international level<sup>iv</sup>.



Slums of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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## HISTORY OF THE ISSUE

The word “slum” first appeared in the 1820s to identify the poorest quality housing and the most unsanitary conditions.<sup>v</sup> These housing areas were centers for activities such as crime and drug abuse and were a likely source of **epidemics** that affected many urban populations all over the

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**Slum:** a heavily populated urban area characterized by substandard housing and extreme poverty.

**Improved Water:** uncontaminated or cleaned water

**Secure Tenure:** the legally protected right of all individuals and groups to occupy property

**Urban Decay:** when cities fall into disrepair or poor conditions

**Infrastructure:** the basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of a community or society, such as transportation and community systems, water and power lines, and public institutions.

**Informal Economy:** businesses that are not monitored or taxed by a government

**Developing countries:** a non-industrialized poor country that is seeking to develop its resources by industrialization.

**Epidemic:** When a large percentage of the population is infected with a disease at the same time

world. In the traditional sense, slums were housing areas that were once considered respectable but which deteriorated after the original dwellers moved on to new and better parts of the city.

There are a number of factors that have contributed to the growth of slums. Since the 1950s, the proportion of people in developing countries working in agriculture has declined by 20-30%.<sup>vi</sup> Urban areas provide increased job opportunities and a chance at an improved lifestyle for rural families. Rural families are often also drawn to urban areas as a result of political conflict. As conflict continues in the rural areas of developing countries, urban regions also offer a sense of safety. Another contributing factor to the growth of slums is insecure tenure. Secure tenure is another way of saying property rights or rights to live in the same place. It is often a precondition for access to other economic and social opportunities such as public services and job opportunities. Without secure tenure, slum-dwellers have very few ways and little incentive to improve their surroundings.



A New York slum during the Industrial Revolution.

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**Globalization** is the most significant factor contributing to the rise of slums. Generally it is defined as growth to a global or worldwide scale.<sup>vii</sup> It is marked through increased migration and immigration from rural to urban areas, the growing level of communication among nations, and the rise of **multinational corporations**.<sup>viii</sup> While globalization can be seen as a positive force of growth, it contributes to the rise of slums through economic booms and busts that create inequality and distribute new wealth unevenly. The result of this phenomenon is a heavily populated area with an extremely large gap between the rich and the poor.

Ongoing industrial revolutions in developing countries have also contributed to slum growth. As developing countries become more heavily industrialized, cities in these countries become hubs of economic activity. For rural farmers, these economic prospects are often appealing, resulting in increased migration to urban areas. This in turn leads to increased population growth in cities. Finally, the attitude of national and local governance towards slums is often one of ignorance or carelessness. Often, national and local governments in developing countries have a host of other issues that prove to be more important or easier to accomplish than tackling the issue of slum growth. As a result, the people of the slums continue to live without necessary resources or infrastructure.<sup>ix</sup>

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**Globalization:** The development of an increasingly integrated global economy, marked by free trade, free flow of money, and the use of cheaper foreign labor

**Multinational Corporations:** companies that operate in more than one country

## DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM

### WHAT IS URBANIZATION?

**Urbanization** is the phenomenon of physical growth in urban areas as a result of rural migration into cities, particularly in developing nations. The United Nations projected that half of the world's population would live in urban areas at the end of 2008.<sup>x</sup> Urbanization occurs as rural-dwellers seek to find new economic opportunities in cities. Traditionally, in rural areas it has been difficult to access manufactured goods and in times of drought, flood, or other natural disaster, survival can become extremely difficult<sup>xi</sup>.



Slum in India

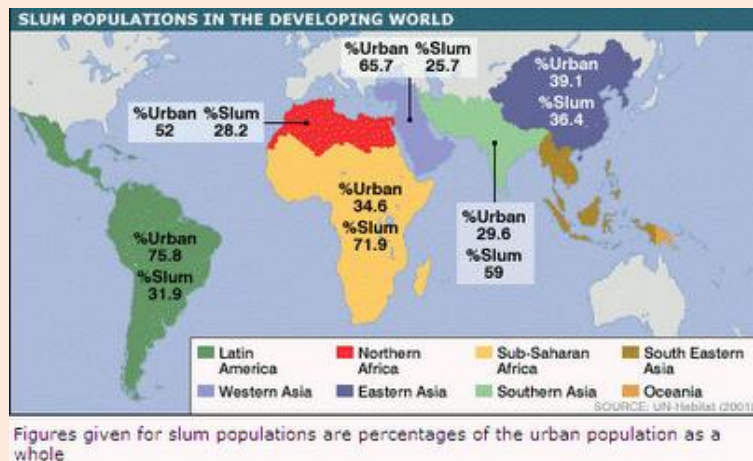
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### WHO IS AFFECTED?

Often, the poorest members of society reside in the slums as a result of increasing costs of housing. Rural migrants to urban areas live in slums due to high rates of population growth in already over-populated cities. It is often easier for the urban poor to find work in slums given the huge presence of the informal economy. While slums are present in almost every country in the world, the most visible slums are located in developing nations, especially those located in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America<sup>xii</sup>.

### REGIONAL DIFFERENCES:

While slums can be found all over the world, there is a much higher concentration of slums in cities located in developing countries compared to their counterparts in developed countries. The largest slums are often found in regions that are undergoing extremely rapid population growth. In developing regions, slum dwellers account for 43% of the population, in contrast to about 6% in more developed regions.<sup>xiii</sup> Although the concentration of slum dwellers is highest in African cities, in numbers alone, Asia



**Urbanization:** the social process whereby cities grow and societies become more urban.



accounts for some 60% of the world's urban slum residents.<sup>xiv</sup> In Sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of urban residents in slums is highest at 71.9%. More than 70% of many African, Caribbean and Pacific States' urban populations live in slums or informal settlements.<sup>xv</sup> This percentage is projected to increase unless interventions are made. This issue is more prevalent in developing countries due to lack of political interest in slum development as well as a lack of resources available for slum development. The proportion of slum dwellers to non-slum dwellers in Africa is rising rapidly as population increase and urban housing shortages continue. Additionally, many of these developing countries have poor infrastructure to begin with so there is little motivation to improve this infrastructure in slums when it cannot be improved in more developed areas of cities. Finally, there is a large reliance in developing countries on informal economies, which are comprised of artisans, local vendors, and often prostitution and drug dealing. This economic system differs from the formal economy of state-sanctioned industry and multi-national corporations. However, in areas in which slums are present, the informal economy is relied on by all other sectors of the economy, formal or not. Therefore, there is little motivation to eliminate the informal economy in slums, given the population's reliance on its services<sup>xvi</sup>.

### Informal Economy

An Informal economy is an economic and business system that exists outside the control of the government. The government does not monitor or tax any informal businesses. Informal economies are the main economies of slums. The type of business that can be found in an informal economy include street vendors, trading for goods and services, odd jobs, and, in many cases, illegal businesses such as the drug trade.

### THE RISE OF SLUMS AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

Slums provide the optimal setting for addressing the objectives of the Millennium Goals, specifically those that relate to education, health care, poverty, and hunger due. Given that such a large percentage of the world's urban population now lives in slums, improvements are necessary in order to satisfy the conditions of the Millennium Development Goals. For example, Millennium Development Goal 4 addresses the reduction of child mortality. Unless improvements are made to address sanitation, hygiene, and clean water in slums, child mortality will continue to increase.<sup>xvii</sup> Additionally, Millennium Development Goal 7 focuses on ensuring environmental sustainability. Given that slum infrastructure is extremely unsustainable and can often lead to a number of environmental issues, it is unlikely that this Goal will be achieved unless infrastructural changes are made.

Today, one out of every three people living in cities in the developing world lives in a slum. In spite of the effort that has been made to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the lack of responsibility in the areas affected by slum growth makes it nearly impossible for slum-dwellers to

access justice. Ways to ensure responsibility do not exist or are inaccessible to people living in poverty.

## THE EFFECTS OF SLUMS ON INFRASTRUCTURE:

### HEALTH

Urbanization is a health hazard for certain vulnerable populations due to overcrowding, shortage of necessary resources, and the high cost of medical-related services. A significant share of ill health in slums stems from poor access to both sanitation and clean drinking water. Immunization coverage in slums in Niger is 35% compared with 86% in non-slum areas.<sup>xviii</sup> Due to inadequate health-related resources, mortality rates in slums are often higher than in surrounding areas. In Nairobi, Kenya, where 60% of the city's population lives in slums, child mortality is 2.5 times greater than in other areas of the city.<sup>xix</sup>

### ENVIRONMENT

In addition to health-related issues caused by living in the slums, there are a number of environmental issues. Many slum dwellings are constructed from low-quality wood and tin and often house a whole family in a single room. As a result of this extremely high population density, indoor pollution, poor air quality, and **communicable diseases** are extremely common.

Due to lack of electricity or other forms of energy, many slum dwellers burn **biomass fuel**, which can cause deterioration of outdoor air quality, reduction of vegetation coverage, and cause slum fires. In addition to high population density, there is extremely high density of pedestrians and traffic in the informal roadways of the slums. The World Health Organization considers traffic to be one of the worst health hazards facing the urban poor and predicts that by 2020, road accidents will be the third leading cause of death.<sup>xx</sup>

Lack of access to clean water is a major infrastructural issue that threatens many slum dwellers throughout the world. In 2000, 30-50% of African urban dwellers lacked a safe water supply.<sup>xxi</sup> Even if it is available, safe water is often too expensive for the urban poor. Often, water pumps are located next to toilets, causing clean water to mix with human waste and in turn, contaminating the water.

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**Communicable Disease:** Disease that passes from one person to another

**Biomass Fuel:** organic matter used for fuel

## CASE STUDY

In South Africa, Abahlali base Mjondolo is a shack-dwellers' movement that campaigns for public housing. It is the largest shack-dwellers' organization in South Africa and focuses on improving the living conditions of poor people. Its key demand is that the social value of land should take priority over the commercial value.<sup>1</sup> What this means is that the value of the land to the population living there should be more important than how much the worth to a corporation or government. The movement has had a considerable degree of success in stopping evictions and forced removals and has won access to basic services. Its philosophy focuses on politics by the poor, for the poor that enables the poor to be active participants in the struggles. Other groups similar to Abahlali base Mjondolo include: The Homeless Workers' Movement, Homeless International, Ranjit Naik, and Slum Dwellers International.

## Past International Actions

The rise of slums is no doubt an international issue. However, given the many different stakeholders in this issue, it can often prove difficult to create change through large-scale international interventions. As a result, a number of smaller and more localized organizations have developed whose aim is to tackle the issue of slum growth at home<sup>xxii</sup>.

### UN-HABITAT

The largest organization focused on improving the lives of slum-dwellers is the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

Established in 1978 and based in Nairobi, Kenya, UN-HABITAT promotes socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.<sup>xxiii</sup> It has regional centers in Nairobi, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Fukuoka, Japan. UN-HABITAT's strategic vision is anchored in a four-pillar strategy aimed at attaining the goal of cities without slums. This strategy consists of advocacy of global norms, analysis of information, field-testing of solution, and financing.<sup>xxiv</sup> UN-HABITAT has been a major player in the creation of slum-upgrading programs that provide affordable housing to slum-dwellers.



A Slum Upgrading project in the midst of construction.

© UN-Habitat

## PARTICIPATORY SLUM UPGRADING PROGRAM

Because slums are not limited to one region or country, cooperation between international organizations has been essential for improving conditions there. One of the approaches to dealing with the rise of slums is a Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP). In this program, inhabitants are not evicted from their dwellings and instead work on urban renewal projects, which improve the physical environment of slums.<sup>xxv</sup> The purpose of the program is to “strengthen the capacity of local, central, and regional institutions through the use of good governance and management approaches.”<sup>xxvi</sup> The program works with local and national stakeholders on key slum-upgrading projects through initiating the creation of a network for addressing regional slum-upgrading challenges.<sup>xxvii</sup> There are currently 29 countries and 63 cities among the African, Caribbean, and Pacific states participating in the program, which also has partnerships with the European Commission, the ACP Group of States, and UN-HABITAT.

## WORLD BANK

The World Bank has undertaken many major slum-upgrading projects since the 1980s. While this process does not necessarily solve the problem of the rise of new slums, it can help fix problems that are already present in existing slums. Countries like Egypt, South Africa, Mexico, Tunisia and Thailand stand out in their efforts towards slum upgrading. Following urban renewal projects in the slums of these countries, slum growth rates had fallen markedly.

## REGIONAL ACTIONS

Slum upgrading can mean many things and a variety of approaches have proven to be effective in many different slums. In Brazil, single-family homes were built in an effort to decrease overcrowding in slum areas.<sup>xxviii</sup> Another approach is community engagement and education. By teaching residents how to improve their health, education, and economic status, residents can become the agents for change rather than constantly having to rely on outside resources. Another approach is the construction of multi-family homes in Morocco which serve to move people out of slum areas but keep the family and social structure of many groups living together intact.<sup>xxix</sup>

## CITIES ALLIANCE PARTNERSHIP

One partnership that has shown a significant commitment to the urban poor is the Cities Alliance Partnership between the World Bank and UN-HABITAT. This is a global alliance of cities and their development partners to “make unprecedented improvements in the living conditions of the urban poor.”<sup>xxx</sup> It includes development banks, other UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, ILO), business leaders, and national and local partners. The World Bank also supports the privatization of services such as water in order to improve efficiency. In spite of theoretical improved efficiency, conditions have not improved due to the fact that most slum-dwellers cannot afford to pay market price for such services, which can lead to social rioting.

## UNITED NATIONS

In general, the United Nations has advocated for increased political will both among developing nations where the slums are located and developed nations that provide aid to the urban poor. The UN has also advocated for infrastructural investment through the creation of better homes, schools, and roads for slum-dwellers. It promotes better urban planning and creates programs that empower the poor. In spite of these programs, concrete actions have been limited due to the belief that each individual nation has the responsibility to address problems within their own borders. The overarching belief of the UN with regards to the urban poor is that demolishing slums is not a sustainable solution and is ultimately a violation of housing rights. Therefore, further action must be taken with regards to infrastructure growth and development in order to improve the lives of the urban poor.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why might developing countries not want to address the problems in their country's slums?
- Are there slums in your country? If so, what are the specific conditions there?
- If no, has your country contributed to the improvement of slums worldwide?
- What role will NGOs and other non-state actors play in resolving the issues of slums?

## Bloc Positions

### EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union believes that access to decent and affordable housing and basic urban services is not only important for adapting to climate change, but also vital for reducing poverty, improving health, and strengthening gender equality among urban poor populations.<sup>xxx</sup>

### ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

ASEAN stresses the value of UN-HABITAT's operations in order to improve the lives of the poor. They believe improvements should be accomplished by setting up credit programs that enable the urban poor to obtain decent and affordable housing. Additionally, they believe that governments must commit to such programs, which would enable housing markets to function more efficiently.<sup>xxx</sup>



## DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Developed countries are willing to contribute large amounts of support and aid (financial and otherwise) to improve the lives of the urban poor. Developed countries are very much affected by the illegal trade that occurs in slums. Additionally, slums are likely to foster radical ideas that can lead to terrorism. Therefore, it is in the best interest of developed countries to offer aid and other support to benefit not only slum-dwellers but their own citizens as well. Developed countries believe that any implemented programs should be sustainable. This could be accomplished by training locals in order to create sustainable and empowering programs that would not be reliant on constant oversight from developed countries.

## DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Developing countries who are most often affected by the rise of slums, generally believe that the United Nations should step in directly to help. Slums lead to an increase in crime and disease as well as a decrease in education rates. Often, the governments of developing countries are too poor to improve these measures individually. Weak government structures due to dictators and corruption make it difficult for individual countries to take action. Additionally, many of the governments of developing countries already rely on foreign aid for many infrastructural improvements. Therefore, it would be relatively easy to reallocate some of this aid to go towards improving the conditions in the slums and the lives of slum-dwellers.

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